

NSC BRIEFING

20 April 1948

WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS

1. An "emergency" ten-day session of the 24th World Zionist Congress opened on 24 April in Jerusalem. The first part of the meeting, to last about two days, is considering the present emergency facing Israel as a result of Communist arms deals with the Egyptians and the American refusal to send arms to Israel. Israel's interest in proceeding unilaterally with the diversion of Jordan waters at Beisan Yasev is also a likely topic. The rest of the congress will be devoted to the problems of world Zionism in general, with particular emphasis on getting stronger financial and political support in world Jewish communities and in speeding up immigration of some 500,000 Jews from North Africa.

2. Some 400 delegates are attending, including 122 from this country. (Representative names attached) Some 50 countries are represented, including, for the first time, Germany, but no one from the Soviet bloc.

3. The World Zionist Congress is an important source of strength and influence for Israel, and the Israeli government will, without abdicating any of its authority for policy decisions, feel inclined to enlist Congress support before making any radical departures. The Congress delegates are not under the same physical threats of danger as resident Israelis, and the Congress may exercise a measure of restraint on the government.

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4. The assembly of Zionist might be considered an attractive target by Arab terrorists although the Arab governments under present circumstances would hardly condone or be a party to such action. However, many of the delegates plan to tour Israel, including the border areas, extensively, and they may become involved in incidents. Any incidents -- and it is not beyond possibility the Israelis might stage one -- would be exploited by the Tel Aviv government to the fullest to gain support and inflame world Jewish opinion.

5. The World Zionist Organization, founded in Basle in 1897, is made up of Zionist federations in nearly all countries of the world with Jewish populations. The Congress meets every few years, the last one in Jerusalem in 1981.

6. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, a bitter debate about the Congress' role has arisen, centered on the functions of the international body with relation to the government of Israel. Ben Gurion took the stand soon after becoming prime minister in 1951 that Zionists outside Israel should have no voice in shaping the country's policies. He held, however, that all Zionists should be responsible for rescuing Jews from Communist and Moslem countries. An agreement, largely reflecting Ben Gurion's views, was finally signed in 1954. He has continued to insist on the importance of the world organization, and is reported loath to take any action against Egypt without first availing himself of this major source of strength.

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Names of prominent US Delegates to 24th World Zionist Congress

Dr. Israel Goldstein	- President, American Jewish Congress
Dr. Nathan Goldman	- Chairman, World Zionist Organization Executive
Mrs. Rebecca Shulman	- National President, Hadassah
Mrs. Rose Kalprin	- Member, Jewish Agency Executive
Mrs. Leonard D. Cohen	- Member, Hadassah National Board
Mrs. Benj. Weissman	- Member, Hadassah National Board
Mrs. Joe. Hammerman	- Member, Hadassah National Board
Mr. M. Elstovitch	- Asst. Executive Director, Zionist Organization of America
Mr. Kalman Szeltsnik	- Secretary, World Confederation of General Zionists